

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BONN 10755 01 OF 03 281532Z
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CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 01 OF 03 BONN 10755

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: OVIP (SCHMIDT, HELMUT), US, GW
SUBJECT: OFFICIAL VISIT OF CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT TO THE
U.S. - JULY 13-14: THE POSITIONS OF SCHMIDT
AND GENSCHER

REFS: A. STATE 134951; B. BONN 7053

BEGIN SUMMARY: CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT AND VICE CHANCELLOR/FOREIGN MINISTER GENSCHER HAVE HAD A RUGGED NINE MONTHS SINCE THEIR PARTIES WON A NARROW VICTORY IN THE NATIONAL ELECTIONS LAST FALL. TO DATE, THEIR SPD/FDP COALITION HAS HELD TOGETHER IN THE BUNDESTAG, ALBEIT AT THE PRICE OF SEVERE DISPUTES AND BICKERING WHICH HAVE ERODED

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PAGE 02 BONN 10755 01 OF 03 281532Z

RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES. THIS DOMESTIC SITUATION COMPELS SCHMIDT AND GENSCHER TO SPEND A GROWING AMOUNT OF TIME ON COALITION POLITICS, AND IT LIMITS THEIR ROOM FOR MANEUVER ON THE GREAT ISSUES BEFORE THE FRG. HOWEVER, THEY ARE BOTH IN A POSITION TO DELIVER ON THEIR INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS.

THE LIKELIHOOD IS THAT SCHMIDT WILL REMAIN AS CHANCELLOR OF THE FRG, AT LEAST UNTIL THE STATE ELECTIONS NEXT YEAR AND PERHAPS THROUGH THE END OF THE BUNDESTAG TERM IN 1980. DEPENDING ON THE OUTCOME OF THOSE ELECTIONS AND ON DYNAMICS WITHIN THE COALITION AND THE OPPPOSITION, THE MOST LIKELY SUCCESSOR, IF SCHMIDT SHOULD FALL, NOW APPEARS TO BE OPPOSITION LEADER HELMUT KOHL. END SUMMARY.

1. LIKE ALL FRG POLITICIANS, SCHMIDT AND GENSCHER USE THEIR TRIPS ABROAD TO ENHANCE THEIR POSITIONS AT HOME. THE CHANCELLOR WON A GOOD DEAL OF POLITICAL MILEAGE FROM HIS ROLE AT THE LONDON SUMMIT MEETINGS LAST MONTH. SIMILARLY, HE AND GENSCHER WILL EXPLOIT THEIR JULY TALKS IN OTTAWA AND WASHINGTON IN AN EFFORT TO REMIND THE FRG PUBLIC ONCE AGAIN THAT THEY -- IN CONTRAST TO KOHL -- ARE ESTABLISHED STATESMEN WHO ALREADY COMMAND RESPECT AND ATTENTION IN MAJOR ALLIED CAPITALS. THE UNEASY STATE OF THEIR COALITION MAKES IT ALL THE MORE NECESSARY FOR SCHMIDT AND GENSCHER TO MAKE THIS POINT AT HOME.

2. BOTH THE CHANCELLOR AND VICE CHANCELLOR ARE PRAGMATIC, MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD POLITICIANS WHO GENERALLY WORK WELL TOGETHER. EACH IS AGGRESSIVE, AMBITIOUS, AND ABLE. THERE IS INEVITABLE RIVALRY BETWEEN THEM, PARTLY PERSONAL (THEY HAVE NEVER DEVELOPED A CLOSE

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BONN 10755 01 OF 03 281532Z

WORKING RELATIONSHIP), AND PARTLY DUE TO THE DIFFERENT INTERESTS OF THEIR RESPECTIVE PARTIES.

A. GENSCHER USES HIS FOREIGN MINISTER ROLE TO ENHANCE HIS POLITICAL PROFILE, AND HE RESENTS EFFORTS BY SCHMIDT AND THE CHANCELLERY TO IMPINGE ON HIS TURF. HIS PARTY MISSES FEW CHANCES TO SQUEEZE NEW CONCESSIONS FROM THE SPD, ACTING ON THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THE FDP HOLDS THE FUTURE OF THIS COALITION IN ITS HANDS.

B. ON THE OTHER SIDE, MANY SPD LEADERS VISCRALLY RESENT THE HIGH PRICE WHICH THEY HAVE HAD TO PAY THE FDP FOR THIS COALITION: I.E., THE FDP HAS AN INFLUENCE IN THE CABINET (FOUR MAJOR PORTFOLIOS) AND FRG POLICY-MAKING FAR OUT OF PROPORTION TO ITS SHARE OF THE ELECTORATE. SPD CIRCLES ARE ALSO AWARE THAT GENSCHER KEEPS A DISCREET LINE OUT TO KOHL AND OTHERS IN THE CDU/CSU CAMP, AS A HEDGE AGAINST THE DAY WHEN THE FDP MAY TRY TO SWITCH PARTNERS.

3. POSITION OF CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT

A. HELMUT SCHMIDT REMAINS FIRMLY IN CHARGE OF

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PAGE 01 BONN 10755 02 OF 03 281536Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 03 BONN 10755

THIS GOVERNMENT, BUT HIS GRIP ON HIS PARTY IS LESS SURE
AND MAY BE SLIPPING. SEVERAL FACTORS MAKE IT LIKELY
THAT SCHMIDT WILL STAY AT THE FRG HELM AT LEAST UNTIL
1978, AND POSSIBLY LONGER. FIRST, THE SPD KNOWS THAT IT
HAS NO CANDIDATE-IN-WAITING WHO CAN MATCH SCHMIDT'S
STATURE OR ABILITY TO HOLD THE COALITION TOGETHER.
SECOND, THE FRG CONSTITUTION REQUIRES THAT THE BUNDES-
TAG AGREE ON A SUCCESSOR IF IT TOPPLES A CHANCELLOR,
AND THE PRESENT BUNDESTAG IS SO DIVIDED THAT IT COULD
HARDLY AGREE ON A CHANCELLOR TO REPLACE SCHMIDT, UNLESS
GENSCHER WERE TO THROW THE FDP'S SUPPORT BEHIND KOHL.
THIRD, THE CDU/CSU OPPOSITION HAS YET TO FIND A WAY TO
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PAGE 02 BONN 10755 02 OF 03 281536Z

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE COALITION'S PROBLEMS AND DRIVE
THE SPD AND FDP APART.

B. WITH ALL HIS ABILITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS,
SCHMIDT HAS PROBLEMS IN COMMUNICATING WITH THE AVERAGE
CITIZEN, INCLUDING THE SPD RANK-AND-FILE. HE LACKS THE
CHARISMA OF ADENAUER OR BRANDT. HIS GOALS, WHILE
SOUND, FAIL TO INSPIRE THE PARTY FAITHFUL AND EVEN THE
GENERAL PUBLIC. YET HE IS, PARADOXICALLY, THE MOST
POPULAR POLITICIAN WITH THE FRG PUBLIC.

C. THE SPD HAS LONG BEEN TORN BETWEEN ITS GOALS
FOR MORE SOCIAL REFORM AND ITS NECESSITY TO COMPROMISE
THOSE GOALS WITH ITS FDP PARTNER. THE SPD LEADERSHIP
SHOWS A LACK OF COHESION WHICH DIVERTS SCHMIDT FROM THE
BUSINESS OF GOVERNMENT. THE PARTY ALSO SUFFERS FROM A
HOST OF OTHER PROBLEMS FOR WHICH SCHMIDT IS BLAMED.
DESPITE THESE FISSURES, HOWEVER, THE SPD CAUCUS HAS
HELD ITS MEMBERS IN LINE AND ENABLED THE COALITION
TO KEEP CONTROL OF THE BUNDESTAG. EVEN WITH A FEW
DEFECTIONS FROM SPD RANKS, THE SPD/FDP GOVERNMENT HAS
WON EVERY MAJOR LEGISLATIVE TEST THIS YEAR. SCHMIDT
DESERVES MUCH CREDIT FOR THIS RESULT.

D. WERE SCHMIDT TO FALL -- FOR WHATEVER REASON --
BEFORE THE END OF THE LEGISLATIVE TERM IN 1980, THE
MOST LIKELY SUCCESSOR NOW APPEARS TO
BE CDU/CSU CAUCUS LEADER HELMUT KOHL.

4. POSITION OF VICE CHANCELLOR/FOREIGN MINISTER GENSCHER

A. HANS-DIETRICH GENSCHER'S FDP HAS FEWER INTERNAL
RIFTS THAN THE SPD, AND FACES EXTERNAL PRESSURES OF A
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PAGE 03 BONN 10755 02 OF 03 281536Z

DIFFERENT KIND. GENSCHER'S GRIP ON HIS PARTY AND ON
HIS PORTFOLIO IS UNCHALLENGED. UNFORTUNATELY, HE
HOLDS TWO FULL-TIME JOBS AND HAS TROUBLE IN MEETING THE
DEMANDS OF BOTH. COALITION PROBLEMS CONSUME AN
INCREASING AMOUNT OF HIS TIME AND LIMIT HIS EFFECTIVE-
NESS AS FOREIGN MINISTER. CONVERSELY, FOREIGN OFFICE
DEMANDS ON HIM ARE GROWING. A FURTHER PROBLEM IS THAT
GENSCHER HAS NO FDP DEPUTY WHOM HE TRUSTS TO RUN THINGS
IN HIS ABSENCE. THE PARTY IS THUS LARGELY A SOLO ACT
BY A BRILLIANT, ALBEIT OVERBURDENED TACTICIAN.

B. GENSCHER TREATS WITH CAUTION ALL CDU/CSU EFFORTS TO INDUCE THE FDP TO ABANDON ITS NATIONAL COALITION WITH THE SPD. SOME QUARTERS OF THE FDP FAVOR A CHANGE, BUT GENSCHER KNOWS THAT A MOVE IN THAT DIRECTION, AT LEAST WITHOUT A MAJOR ISSUE OF PRINCIPLE WHICH COULD BE EXPLAINED TO FDP SUPPORTERS, WOULD COST THE FDP HEAVILY. IN FACT, ANY CHANGE IN PARTNERS WOULD COST

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PAGE 01 BONN 10755 03 OF 03 281536Z

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 03 BONN 10755

THE PARTY SOME SUPPORT AND HENCE BRING IT CLOSER TO POLITICAL OBLIVION. (THE FDP WON ONLY 7.9 PERCENT OF THE VOTE IN THE 1976 NATIONAL ELECTIONS, AND THE FRG CONSTITUTION REQUIRES THAT A PARTY CAPTURE AT LEAST 5 PERCENT IN ORDER TO HAVE SEATS IN THE BUNDESTAG.) MOREOVER, THE FDP KNOWS THAT SCHMIDT IS DETERMINED, IF AT ALL POSSIBLE, NOT TO OFFER IT AN EXCUSE FOR LEAVING THE PRESENT COALITION.

C. TWO ADDITIONAL FACTORS EXPLAIN GENSCHER'S
CAUTION. FIRST, THE FDP HAS A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF
MAJOR MINISTRIES AND MUCH INFLUENCE IN THIS COALITION.
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PAGE 02 BONN 10755 03 OF 03 281536Z

IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE HOW THE PARTY COULD FARE BETTER
IN A COALITION WITH THE CDU/CSU. SECOND, GENSCHER HAS
ALREADY KEPT HIS OPTIONS OPEN BY SUPPORTING TWO STATE-
LEVEL COALITIONS WITH THE CDU. THIS STRATEGY HAS PAID
OFF SOMEWHAT IN THAT THE FDP HAS BEEN ABLE ON A FEW
ISSUES -- BUT NOT ALL -- TO PERSUADE ITS CDU PARTNER
AT THE STATE LEVEL TO SUPPORT LEGISLATION FAVORED BY
THE SOCIAL-LIBERAL COALITION IN BONN. THE
ULTIMATE TEST FOR THIS STRATEGY, HOWEVER, WILL BE THE
FOUR STATE ELECTIONS NEXT YEAR. UNTIL THAT TIME, AND
POSSIBLY AFTERWARD, GENSCHER WILL PROBABLY SEEK TO
MAINTAIN HIS NATIONAL COALITION WITH THE SPD.

5. WITH ALL ITS DOMESTIC PROBLEMS AND INTERNAL
TENSIONS, THE RULING SPD/FDP COALITION IS IN CONTROL
OF THE SITUATION. SCHMIDT AND GENSCHER CAN THUS BE
COUNTED ON TO KEEP WHATEVER COMMITMENTS THEY MAKE.
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